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- MOST SECRET -

COPY No. 10

W.M.(41) 48th CONCLUSIONS. MINUTE 6.

Confidential Annex.

(8th May, 1941, 12 Noon.)

U.S.A.

Fleet  
Dispositions.

The War Cabinet were reminded of the proposal put forward by the United States Government (and outlined in telegram GLEAM 42, of the 29th April) that certain units of the United States Fleet should now be moved from the Pacific into the Atlantic.

As arranged at a Meeting of the Defence Committee on the 1st May\*, the views of the Australian and New Zealand Governments had been obtained. A telegram had now been despatched to Washington (No. 2453, of the 8th May) informing our Military Mission that these two Governments had now expressed their general concurrence in our view that any marked advance by the United States Navy into the Atlantic was, on the whole, more likely to deter Japan from going to war than the maintenance of a very large American Fleet at Hawaii. Further, such a movement into the Atlantic might exercise a profound influence on the present critical position in Spain, Turkey and Vichy France; and American action in this sense should accordingly be encouraged. Owing to an oversight, this telegram had not been seen by the Foreign Secretary before despatch.

THE FOREIGN SECRETARY drew attention to telegram 757 from Sir R. Craigie, in which the view was expressed that a movement of the United States Fleet such as was contemplated would be regarded as evidence that we were very hard pressed in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and might well constitute a temptation to southward expansion by Japan which would be too strong to be resisted.

THE PRIME MINISTER did not share the view put forward in Sir R. Craigie's telegram, and adhered to the views he had expressed earlier.

In discussion, it was pointed out that if part of the United States Fleet were now to move from the Pacific into the Atlantic, this would mean that we should not have to wait for this movement to take place before ships were sent from Home Waters to the Far East.

THE FIRST SEA LORD also thought that the United States Fleet left at Hawaii would be as capable of raiding the Japanese coast as the whole Fleet now concentrated there.

The general view of the War Cabinet was, therefore, against any modification of the instructions to our Military Mission contained in telegram 2453 to Washington.

Great George Street, S.W.1.

\*D.O (41) 22nd Meeting.

f Copy attached.

[Cypher]

SPECIAL (AMERICAN).FROM WASHINGTON TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

Viscount Halifax.  
No. 1883.  
29th April, 1941.

D. 10.39 p.m. 29th April, 1941.  
R. 6.45 a.m. 30th April, 1941.

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MOST IMMEDIATE.  
MOST SECRET.

Gleam 42.

Following from Military Mission for Chiefs of Staff.

Secretary of the Navy Knox to-day summoned Admiral Danckwerts and Captain Clark to Navy Department. Others present at the meeting were: Mr. Stimson, Admiral Stark, Rear-Admiral Turner, General Marshall.

2. Colonel Knox said that he wished to consult us about our views on the following proposition. What did we think would be the result if the United States now moved almost the whole of their Pacific Fleet into the Atlantic, leaving Hawaii to defend itself against any attack, and leaving only such forces as Chief of Naval Operations might consider necessary for the protection of the West coast sea communications? (Subsequently Admiral Danckwerts ascertained from Rear Admiral Turner that the forces that would be left in the Pacific would be of the order of 3 or 4 battleships, 4 6 inch cruisers, 5 old 6 inch cruisers, 30 to 40 destroyers, number of flying boats, 20 long-range submarines).

3. In the discussion it became clear that the upshot was that United States would remain non-belligerent for the time-being, and that the forces thus transferred would not act more belligerently than those now employed on the Western hemisphere defence plan No. 2.

4. Admiral Danckwerts replied that from a strictly naval and strategical point of view he must assume that Japan would seize the opportunity presented to her to carry out aggressive actions to the southward, and that therefore, it was not sound to leave the Pacific without either a United States or a British Fleet. If this move was made, therefore, it would be desirable for the United Kingdom to send to the East a fleet of not less than 9 capital ships, since that was the least number that the Chiefs of Staffs judged necessary in the absence of the United States co-operation in the Pacific. If, however, as many as 6 United States battleships were left in the Pacific it would not be necessary to send more than 6 British capital ships to Singapore, and that generally speaking to check Japan it was necessary to have in the whole of the Pacific area either a fleet of the strength of 9 capital ships concentrated at Singapore or Hawaii or a fleet at each base of not less than 6 ships. (Note:- "capital ships" in this discussion were used purely as a measure of strength of a balanced fleet).

5. No British Capital Ship Fleet could be sent to the East at all without abandoning Eastern Mediterranean and or stripping the Atlantic trade routes of Capital Ships' protection. It was not anticipated that the abandonment of the Mediterranean would be forced upon us, and it would not be possible to take British Capital Ships away from the Atlantic unless their functions were performed by the United States ships. This would necessitate escorts and belligerency by the United States, which was not a hypothesis under consideration.

6. In a subsequent discussion it was agreed that from a strictly naval and strategical point of view therefore, it would not be sound to reduce the United States Pacific fleet below 9 battleships unless the United States came into the war. This was also the view of the Chief of Naval Operations and Admiral Turner.

7. Mr. Stimson then raised the discussion to a wider plane, and urged the tremendous effect that such a move might produce. He suggested that the Japanese would take a long range view, and would interpret movement of United States Pacific fleet to mean that United States must be shortly about to enter the war, and that in consequence the addition of the whole weight of her navy to a decisive theatre of the Atlantic would definitely foreshadow victory in "Battle of the Atlantic" and the ultimate defeat of the Axis Powers. Under these circumstances he suggested that the Japanese would refrain from any action for fear of being on the losing side in the long run.

8. Mr. Stimson also stressed the important psychological effect the proposed move would have in encouraging the United Kingdom and her Allies and correspondingly depressing the Axis peoples, and the stirring effect it would have on the American people who would realise great importance of such a move.

9. Admiral Danckwerts suggested that if Japanese choose to seize this opportunity of temporary freedom from any naval threat, they might establish themselves in North Borneo and Dutch East Indies in such a way as to facilitate their subsequent operations against Singapore or as a threat to Australia, even if United States Pacific fleet eventually turned to the Pacific and a United Kingdom fleet was sent to Far East. Admiral Danckwerts suggested that they propose to calculate on some two months before their operations were seriously interfered with.

/10. At.....



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10. At the end of the discussion it seemed to be generally agreed that on purely questionable [sic] and strategical grounds the move of nearly the whole of the Pacific fleet would be unsound, but that from a wider point of view there might be considerable force in Mr. Stimson's arguments. Decision would be a gamble on the reaction of Japanese. If they react belligerently it was tolerable [sic] they would achieve nothing irreparable before the naval situation was rectified by redistribution of naval forces which would be possible with the entry of the United States into the war, though there was no guarantee that United States intervention would be immediate.

11. Mr. Stimson and Colonel Knox both suggested that the matter might be referred to higher authority in United Kingdom.

12. The discussion[s] had no direct connexion with the question[s] put in Glean No. 39 although they were obviously a further development of line of thought of those questions. United States Naval Staff were in possession of the reply contained in your Boxes No. 33, but it had not yet reached the Chiefs of Staff or Secretaries of Navy and War.

# OUTWARD TELEGRAM

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[Cypher].

SPECIAL (AMERICAN).FROM FOREIGN OFFICE TO WASHINGTON.No: 2453.

D: 1.20 a.m. 8th May, 1941.

8th May, 1941.

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IMMEDIATE.

Following for Military Mission from Defence  
Committee. Begins:

MOST SECRET.

Telegrams Nos: 2270, 2336 and 2347:-

Inform United States authorities that issues raised in your Glean 42 have been considered by the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet, and that as such a move vitally affects Australia and New Zealand we have obtained their opinions.

2. Our opinion, which is concurred in generally by both Australia and New Zealand, is that any marked advance by the United States navy in or into the Atlantic is on the whole more likely to deter Japan from going to war than the maintenance of the present very large United States fleet at Hawaii, and further that it might exercise a profound influence on the present critical situation in Spain, Turkey and Vichy France. You should, therefore, strongly encourage American action in this sense.

3. The problem for the United States authorities is so nicely to judge the degree of transfer that while still retaining the deterrent effect of a strong United States fleet in the Pacific, there will also be the deterrent effect of an increased United States fleet in the Atlantic.

4. It is not only the strength but also the composition of the fleet in the Pacific which will act as a deterrent, and in our view the necessary effect will not remain unless the fleet in the Pacific consisted of not less than 6 capital ships and two aircraft carriers. The inclusion of the latter is considered of the greatest importance.

[Cypher].

DEPARTMENTAL (SECRET)FROM TOKYO TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

Sir R. Craigie.  
 No. 757.  
 7th May, 1941.

D. 5.25 p.m. 7th May, 1941.  
 R. 4.10 p.m. 7th May, 1941.

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IMMEDIATE.

Most Secret.

Your telegram No. 536.

Japanese would regard either contingency as evidence that the United States was about to enter into the War against Germany and would prepare for action under Article 3 of the Tripartite Pact.

2. In the case of contingency (a) I hope, though I cannot be too sanguine, that Japan would find some pretext for avoiding actual hostilities in virtue of the Tripartite Pact provided that any subsequent United States armed action against Germany could with some show of play be made to appear here as defensive (i.e. not as an "attack" under Article 3). The sending of strong British fleet to the Far East would of course be widely heralded as provocative to Japan but this risk can be taken provided that it is made perfectly clear that we are acting in full strategical unison with the United States.

3. Contingency (b) would be regarded as evidence that we are so hard pressed in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean that the United States can no longer risk keeping her [?gp.omitted] in the Pacific when the opportunity would be provided which Japan has long awaited. The deterrent effect of the presence of the United States fleet in the Pacific has been very obvious here and were this removed without simultaneous and equivalent reinforcement of British naval strength, the temptation for further southward expansion (even in advance of and independently of action rendered necessary under the Tripartite Pact) would be too strong to be resisted. Moreover the belief in extremist circles that Japan could attack us without becoming involved with the United States would be greatly strengthened. The more moderate elements would foresee that a Japanese attack on British territory or on Siam (Thailand) or the Netherlands East Indies must eventually involve Japan in a disastrous war with the British Empire and the United States combined, but I believe that they would be overruled on the grounds that the initial gains to be derived from moving while the Pacific was empty of war forces could be retained in the event of German victory or on stalemate in Europe.

4. If your contingency (a) is based on the assumption of our withdrawal from the Mediterranean or the loss of Suez this introduces new factors which I have not taken into account in the above observations.